If you think you have been at risk of getting HIV you should go to your nearest STI/GUM clinic or hospital Emergency Department (outside of clinic hours) as soon as possible to see if you need to go on PEP. PEP is available for free but there may be a charge for attending the emergency department.

For more information on PEP:
- HIV Ireland: http://www.hivireland.ie/hiv/prevention/pep/
- Man2man: http://man2man.ie/prevention/pep/

What is pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)?
PrEP is medication which you can take before exposure to HIV (including before sex) to prevent HIV infection. PrEP is used by HIV negative people to prevent them from becoming HIV positive.

PrEP is not currently available in Ireland through the HSE, though some people are accessing it themselves. If you are accessing PrEP yourself, it is important that you are monitored for HIV, other STIs and side effects from the medications. Discuss this with your doctor or nurse.

For further information on PrEP, see the patient information leaflet: HIV PrEP in Ireland.

Getting tested and knowing your HIV status
Knowing your HIV status allows you to get the information you need to keep you and your partner (or partners) healthy.

- Having a HIV test and knowing that you do not have HIV can encourage you to have safer sex and stay HIV negative.
- If you test positive for HIV you can get the essential treatment and care to live a healthy life and prevent transmission to your partner (or partners).

What about my partner?
If you test positive for HIV, your current partner (or partners) will also need to be tested. Some of your previous partners may also need to be tested. You can discuss this further with your doctor or nurse at the HIV clinic.

Can HIV be treated?
Yes, HIV can be treated and managed effectively with medications.

If you test positive for HIV, you will be referred to a specialist HIV clinic, and your doctor and nurse will explain the treatment options to you.

HIV treatment stops HIV reproducing in the body. When taken properly the medication enables most people with HIV live a long and healthy life.

When taken properly, these medications also reduce the chance of a person living with HIV passing HIV on to someone else. When the treatment is working properly, there is effectively no risk that a person with HIV can pass on HIV to another person.

The earlier you are diagnosed and can start on treatment, the better.

At present there is no cure for HIV which means that treatment is lifelong.

For further information on HIV treatment, see the patient information leaflet: Antiretroviral Therapy for People Living with HIV in Ireland.

HIV testing in pregnancy
Screening pregnant women for HIV is a routine part of care in pregnancy and is usually done during the first antenatal visit.

If a pregnant woman tests positive for HIV during pregnancy, she is immediately referred to a specialist HIV service where a management plan is developed to minimise the risk of the baby being infected with HIV. This includes taking anti-HIV medication, monitoring the response to medication and making a plan for delivery.

In Ireland, when the management plan is in place, the chance of a baby being infected with HIV is less than 1 in 1000.

You can order more copies of this leaflet free of charge from www.healthpromotion.ie

A guide to HIV

October 2017

You can order more copies of this leaflet free of charge from www.healthpromotion.ie

Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme
What is HIV?
Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the human immune system and weakens its ability to fight infection and disease. Early treatment of HIV keeps the immune system strong and prevents illness. Untreated HIV can lead to a number of serious conditions when the immune system is severely damaged.

How common is HIV?
Over 6,000 people are estimated to be living with HIV in Ireland. It is estimated that about 15% of those living with HIV in Ireland don’t yet know they have HIV, because they have either never had a HIV test, or they got HIV since their last test. Between 2003 and 2014, the number of people testing positive for HIV in Ireland was relatively stable at around 300 to 400 per year. This increased in 2015, and more recently, around 400 to 500 people are testing positive for HIV in Ireland as all blood donations are tested.

How do I get HIV?
- You cannot get HIV from:
  - touching or hugging
  - coughing or sneezing
  - kissing
  - sharing a glass, cup, cutlery, etc.
  - saliva, sweat, urine
  - sharing a public toilet seat.

- very rarely through oral sex without a condom with someone who is HIV positive and not on effective HIV treatment (this risk is extremely low)
- sharing needles or works (injecting equipment) with someone who is HIV positive and not on effective HIV treatment
- during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding from mother to child where the mother is not on effective HIV treatment
- contaminated blood products (very unlikely in Ireland as all blood donations are tested).

What symptoms would I have with HIV?
Some people may get a flu-like illness when they first become infected with HIV. If you have these symptoms after a potential exposure to HIV, you should go for a HIV test.

- Many people are often unaware that they’re infected because they may not feel sick right away or for many years after being infected with HIV. If you have been at risk for HIV, it is important to get tested.
- During the window period a person can be infected with HIV but still have a negative HIV test. The window period is the time between when you may have been exposed to HIV, and the point when the test will give an accurate result.
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How soon after exposure should I get a HIV test?
If you think you are at risk, you should get medical advice as soon as possible. You will be tested straight away and may need to repeat the HIV test after the window period. This will depend on how long ago your risk for HIV was. Your doctor or nurse will explain this to you.

How can I protect myself from getting HIV?
You can reduce your risk of getting HIV by:
- using condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex
- not sharing sex toys, or using condoms if you do
- not sharing needles or other injecting equipment (spoons, filters, water, etc.)
- taking post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) if you have been exposed to HIV
- taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) if you are at high risk (not currently available through the HSE)
- getting tested and knowing your HIV status.

What is post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)?
PEP is a course of medication that you need to start up to 72 hours (3 days and nights) after you have been exposed to HIV, such as through condomless sex, sharing needles or pricking yourself with an infected needle. PEP reduces the chance of you becoming HIV positive in these circumstances.

How can I be tested for HIV?
HIV is diagnosed with a blood test. All STI clinics offer HIV testing. Some GPs provide HIV testing or can arrange for you to have a test.

- Rapid HIV testing is also available through some community outreach programmes. The test is carried out by taking a finger prick sample of blood and the results are available in minutes. Some rapid tests are done on oral fluid.
- It is really important if you are having a HIV test to know the window period for the test.
- The window period is the time between when you have been at risk for HIV, such as MSM and people who inject drugs, it is important to get tested for HIV if you have been at risk.

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